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ABSTRACT

Patchwork quilting is an original folk art in the United States. Pilgrims first used worn out scraps of cloth to make bed covers in an age of scarcity. Featured here are stories on East Texas Quilts, their origins, the love and hard work which goes into the making of a quilt (Ira Barr and others). The techniques needed to construct a quilt are described including designing the quilt, cutting the fabric, preparing the batting, putting the materials together, and adding additional designs with embroidery. Several photographs of local quilt designs are included. (BZ)

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East Texas Quilts

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Winter 1986

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Volume X No. 1 Winter 1986

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Front cover: Kim Speer and Stephanie Davis of Loblolly observing Susan Weaver, Master Quilter.

Hello Readers,

We hope you'll be pleased to know that we at Loblolly have a full year ahead planned for you this Sesquicentennial, the 150th birthday of Texas. We have finished work on the Loblolly Book II, which will be out in August (Texas Monthly Press). Right now we're all busy working on a third Loblolly Book about the preservation of foods, and cooking with wood stoves, as well as recipes for lots of wonderful dishes.

In this issue of the magazine, we feature stories on quilts, their origins, the story behind some of them, and the amount of love and hard work which goes into the making of the quilt. In this issue we take an in depth look at an age old tradition in East Texas and the surrounding area.

In our next issue, due out this summer, we'll take a close look at the miracle of electricity in rural East Texas. We'll examine how long it was before some people got electricity and the way it changed their lives. This feature article has proved very educational and interesting.

The Loblolly appreciates your support as we continue in our efforts to preserve the history, and memories of the people in this area. Have a happy and productive Sesquicentennial.

Thank you,
Karen Whiteside, Editor

East Texas Quilts

"Sometimes you have no control over the way things go. Hail ruins the crops, or fire burns you out. And then you're just given so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you got. That's what piecing is. The materials is apssed on to you or it is all you can afford to buy.... Your fate.

But the way you put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like."

Mary White, The Quilters by

Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buferd (1971)

We found Susan Weaver to be a good friend and very knowledgedable on the history and art of quilting. We visited with her in Henderson and were able to share the experience of quilt making from start to finish through her. It was an exciting "hands on" exercise and made quilts and their history a reality for us.

Patchwork quilting is an original American folk art. The art came into being because of our necessity. Quilting itself began in China, where garments were made of three layers of material for warmth. In Europe in the 1700's three layers of material were used for bed covers. The tops were a solid piece of printed cloth and the quilting was done around the designs, much like quilted bed spreads today.

When the Pilgrims came to America, they didn't have much material. When clothing or bed linens wore out, the scraps were saved and used. They pieced the scraps together to make bed covers. Patch work quilting had begun.

The top of the quilt is made first. Cloth is cut into small pieces, using cardboard patterns as guides. The pieces are sewn together to make square patches, usually 12 to 14 inches. The patches are joined together to make a quilt. When the top is finished, a bottom piece of cloth is cut to match the size of the top. Batting is prepared to fill the middle, between the top and the bottom. The sewing used to join the layers is called quilting.

When batting was prepared by hand, using either cotton or wool, quilting had to be very close together or the batting would shift. This shifting caused thin spots or cold spots. Old quilts have tremendous amounts of quilting in order to keep one warm and to make it pretty too.

The type of batting can help tell the age

of a quilt. A quilt made before the invention of the cotton gin will have little pieces of the cotton plant in the cotton batting. You can feel the little pieces of leaves and stem. Ginned cotton batting came next, these quilts had lots of stitching. The cotton had a tendency to hump up and shift. Today batting is made from polyester. It makes a smooth, fluffy quilt.

Carding is the first step in preparing quilting batting or thread for sewing. The raw material cotton or wool will have already been picked or sheared.

The wool or cotton is spread out on one of the cards, this is called teasing. Then you draw the two cards over each other until the fibers are straight. Then you sort of back comb the cards and the fibers come off the cards in a reel. These are called batts in quilting. I recently read a article on carding where the lady measured the amount of carded cotton that she needed to put in her quilt by the height of her chair. When the pile of batts reached the top of her chair back she had enough.

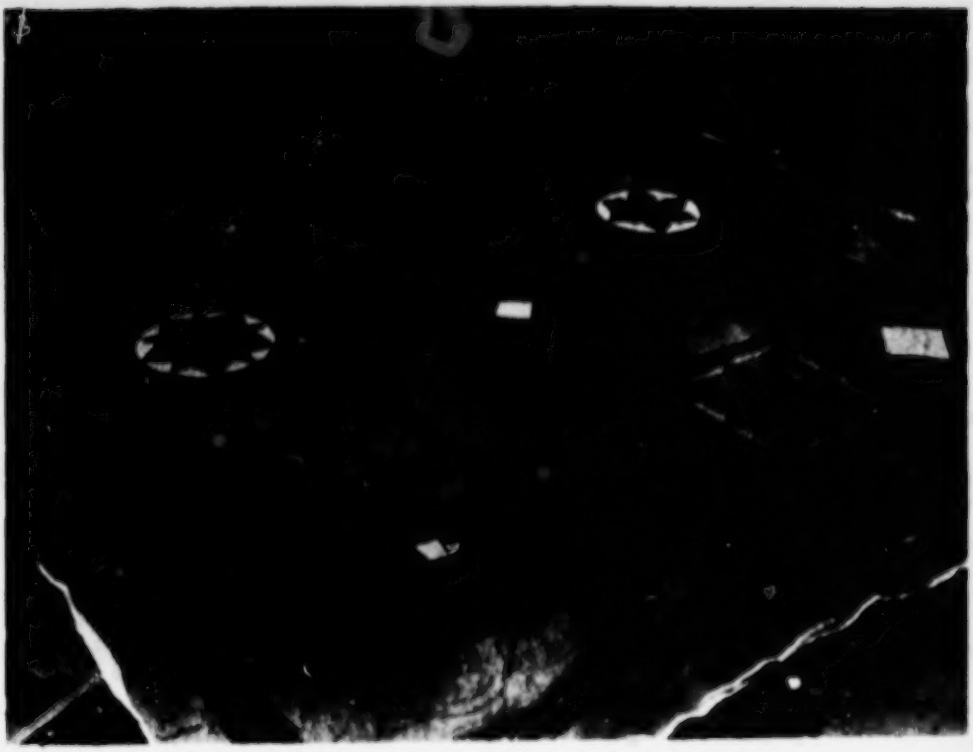
In today's quilt world, any item that has three layers that are sewn together could be considered as quilted. Sometimes the tops are painted, embroideried, dyed, stenciled, etc. Traditionally, quilt tops were pieced, appliquied, or embroidered. In pieced quilts, pieces are cut up and sewn together in a pattern. Appliqued quilts have to have the design cut out and whip stitched to a square of cloth to create a picture or design. You have to finish the edges of each piece by folding the edge under.

In embroidered tops the design is made with fancy stitch work using colored threads. These three types of quilts are broken up into pattern classification.

When you think of patchwork quilts you

Susan Weaver, spinning to make quilting thread.

Susan Weaver and her Sampler Quilt.



The Texas Sampler Quilt.

automatically think of scrap quilts. Scraps in quilts, were put together with no particular color scheme in mind. The quilter used what she had on hand in the scrap bag. One of the things that makes these old quilts so appealing is the structure of the material used. Early dyes did not make bright colors. The dye lots were not as permanent as they are today. As the quilt was washed the whole thing began to harmonize in a pleasing posted effect. An old quilt that was red and green, a popular color combination, today is rust and brown.

Anyone, who puts together a good looking scrap quilt today, has done the impossible because the dyes don't fade and harmonize as in the old days. It takes a lot of color knowledge and searching for the right material

to get it to be pleasing to the eye.

String quilts are pieced from strips of cloth that are put together into patches without any exact pattern. An example of string quilting is the spider web pattern. The patches are pieced on the diagonal. Four patches are joined to make blocks, and they make a spider web shape.

Quilters have always used any material that was available, and one of these materials was flour sacks. Flour came in muslin sacks. The sacks were many times cut up into pieces for tops and used for the back of the quilt. Quilts made during the Depression, when times were hard, have pieced flour sack backs. You can still read "Beaula's Best" on the pieces. The flour companies also put out flour sacks in prints for pillow cases or quilting. I have a quilt pieced by my grandmother that has our outgrown clothes, scraps, and flour sack material in it.

The last year in our quilt show, we had a quilt where the flour company printed pictures on the sacks to be used in quilts. It probably was the first quilt kit.

The most popular type of appliqued quilt is the floral. It is definitely the most popular type of quilt in East Texas. Picture quilts are created using the applique techinique. Other types of appliqued quilts are Hawaiian, the pattern is cut like a large snowflake and sewn to a solid piece; Albrum quilts, each floral square is different; and combination quilts, appliqued and pieced techniques used together.

Once the top is prepared and the batting carded, it's time to get down to the quilting. The three layers are basted together and the quilt is put onto a frame. The frame holds the layers together smoothly, so sewing is easier. The old time frame hung from the ceiling. Today hoops are made large enough

Susan Weaver traces pattern, Shell Pattern Quilt.

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for top quilting. Smaller floor mounted frames are also available.

The old time quilting bee was a time to get together with friends and neighbors and quilt up that top that was just pieced. A group of ladies could quilt a quilt in a day. It was also a social event, they would bring lunch and have a good visit.

In East Texas today, there are still groups that meet to quilt. Many of the groups are working for their church or civic organization. There's a group in Tatum that meets one time a week, and donate money that they recieve for quilting from the public to the Heritage House, and Senior Citizens Center there.

Quilts and quilting is very popular at the present time. Quilting began its comeback during Americas' Bicentennial and has continued to grow as quilts used as decorations in the home have become popular. Quilting and fiber arts are finally being recognized as an art form. We will be seeing more exhibits in art museums of quilts and more artist are finding the media attractive.

People not only made quilts for the warmth they gave but also to commemorate a special event. A look at the names of some of the patterns will tell you that political events have always been popular. The Sesquicentennial in Texas will create a lot of quilting. Friendship quilts where different people made a block and put their name on it, have been a way to show love for people for generations.

Special quilts to commemorate a wedding, historical events in your town, children growing up, or a holiday are all popular. The most unusual quilt in the variety that I have seen, and I've only seen pictures of it, was a funeral quilt. It was made in Kentucky in 1890 by a lady who was grieving the loss of

three sons. In the center of the quilt she appliqued a grave yard and around the border she placed caskets. As persons in her family died she moved caskets to the grave yard. She did it to work through her grief.

Every quilt, fancy or plain, is a story. It may be a political or historical event or as simple as tracing the growth of the family through their ourgrown clothes cut into quilt pieces. The more you know about quilting, patterns, techniques, etc., the greater your understanding of the art form. The art is a lot like contemporary painting. You need to know the artist, to fully understand the work.

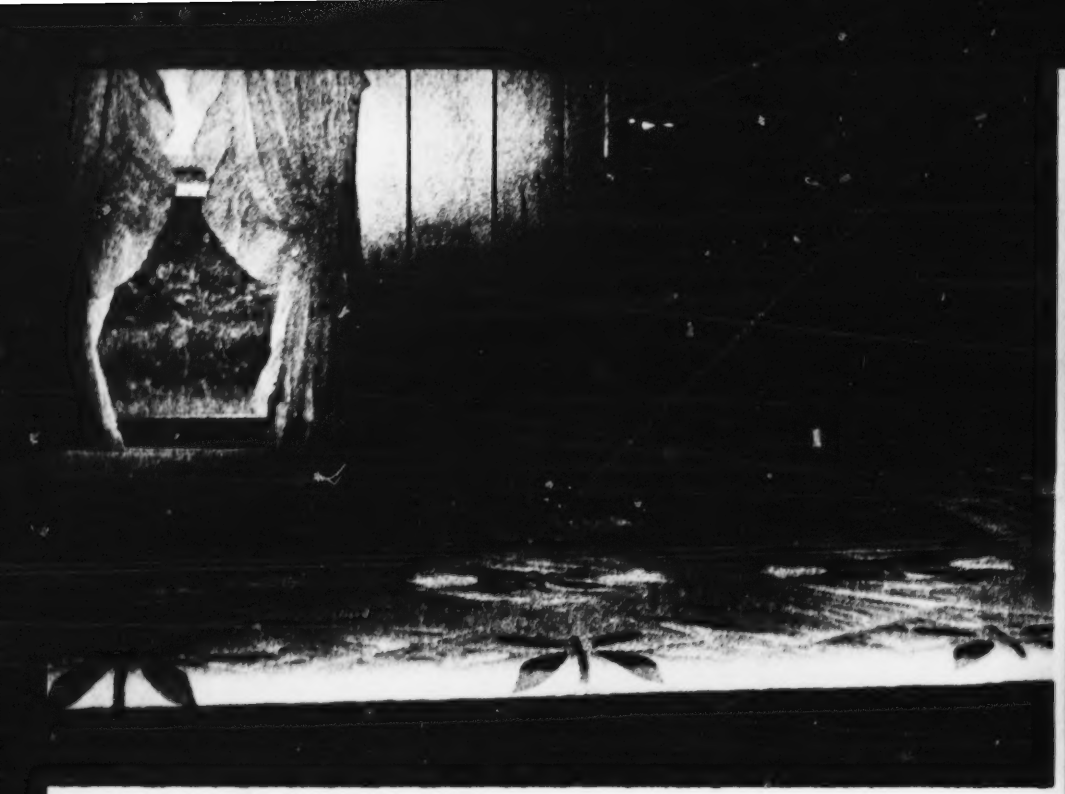
I always thought I'd like to quilt. I've been sewing since I was six. When my children were young I just didn't seem to have the patience. I had several quilts as both my grandmothers quilted.

I began to quilt when I went to work at the Depot in Henderson. We wanted to show folks art of this area, and quilting sounded or seemed to be a good place to start. The Howard House had a sucessful quilt show, so we knew the interest was there.

So five years ago, I checked out books from the library and began to quilt seriously. We have had five successful quilt shows and have taught two classes in quilting.

Vivian Burnaman

I've been quilting since I was about 14 years old. I made two quilts when I was about 14 or 15 years old, and I still have them. I learned to quilt from my mother and grandmother. I've made quilts all through the years because that used to be the only covers we had. I can remember we used quilts in the wagon in the spring seat. Those were our cushions. We also used to make pallets on the



Vivian Burnaman working on a Tulip pattern appliqued quilt.

floor. We even carried our quilts to make pallets at church when the kids were growing up. And we had to have pallets in the summer. We used quilts to cover the potatoes up in the winter time, in the doorways, for doors in the winter time when it was cold. We used quilts for dogbeds. I'm in the process of making all my grandchildren a quilt. I made all my children one last year. It usually takes about two weeks to finish a quilt. But if a bunch of us get together we can do it in a week. We have quilting bee's and we've finished five quilts in two months. At whatever house we're at, the lady would fix lunch for us and we would have a spread.

I remember about 40 years ago, we lived further out in the country and the ladies had a certain day a week to meet. I didn't always get to quilt 'cause I couldn't quilt very good. I usually helped out in the kitchen.

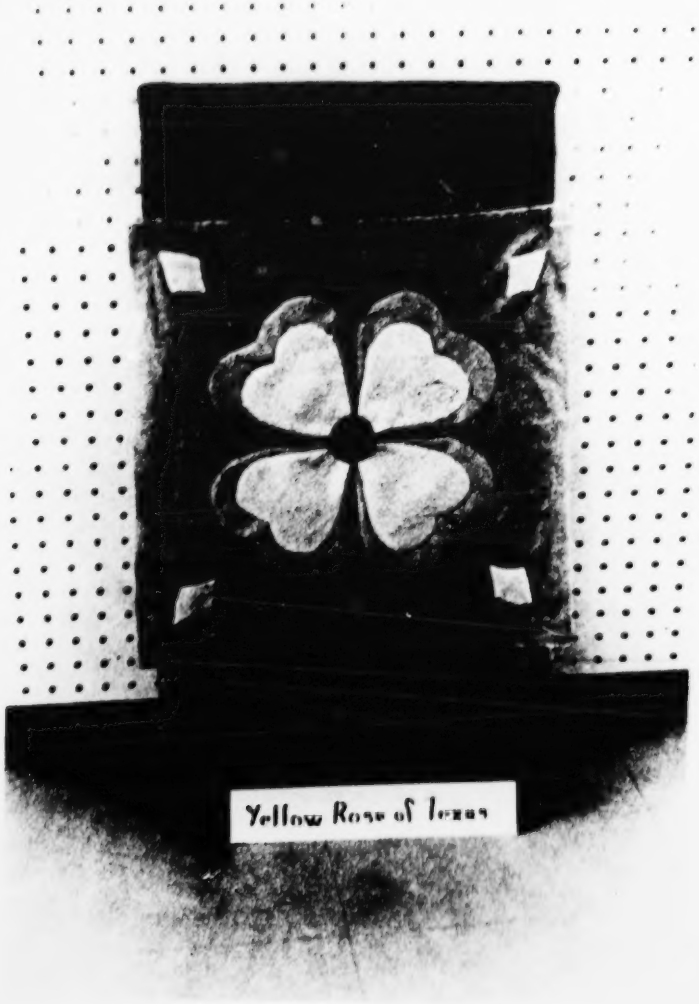
You know back when I was growing up it was just mostly the country women that quilted, but now it seems like its an art that has revived and everybody likes it. For a while it seemed like quilting had gone out of style, but its a big thing now everywhere you go.

It's great fun, and I enjoy it now. But when my children were growing up, I made them to keep warm. We didn't make pretty quilts then, you just made something real quick like to keep yourself warm.

I remember in the winter, we would have four or five quilts on one bed. And if you had a big family you had to make a lot of quilts. We normally just made scrap quilts out of sacks of whatever we had. Old woolen pants legs made warm quilts.

I can remember having to card cotton and laying the cotton on mats. We used little pieces of flat cotton, just about as wide as your hand. And you had to lay those down for your lining. That involved a lot of work.

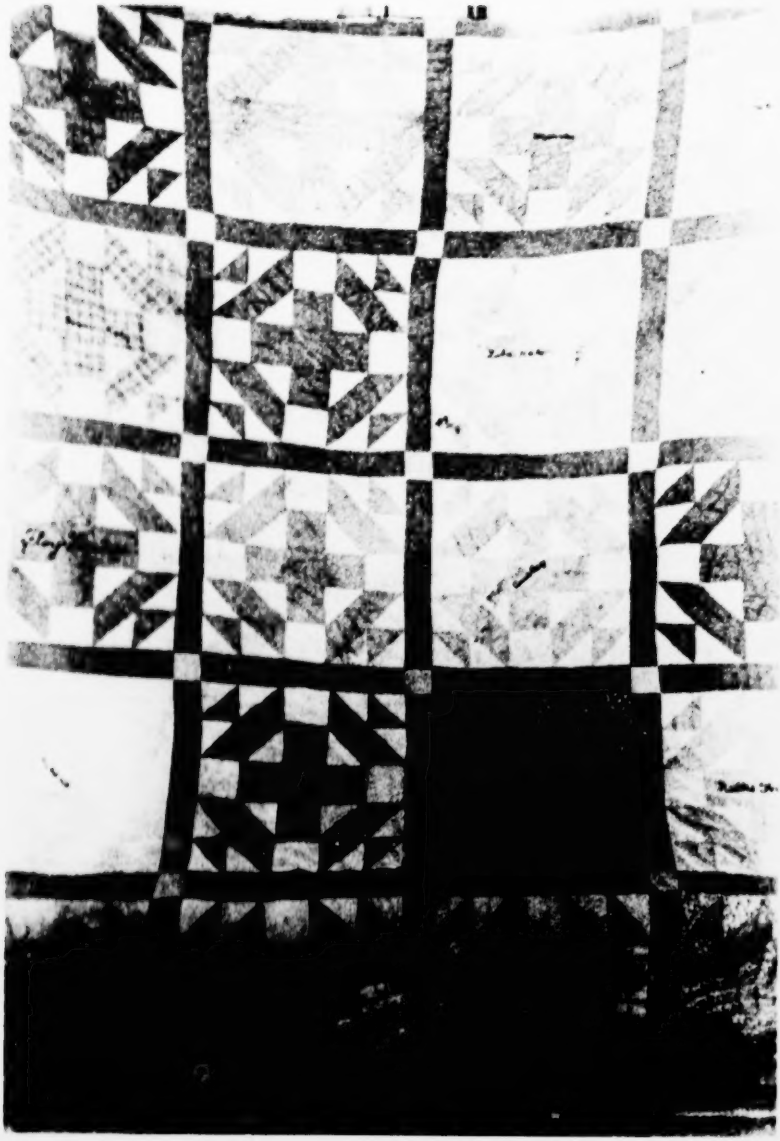
Quilts, then were a necessity, it wasn't really fun to make them because you used what you had.



Appliqued square

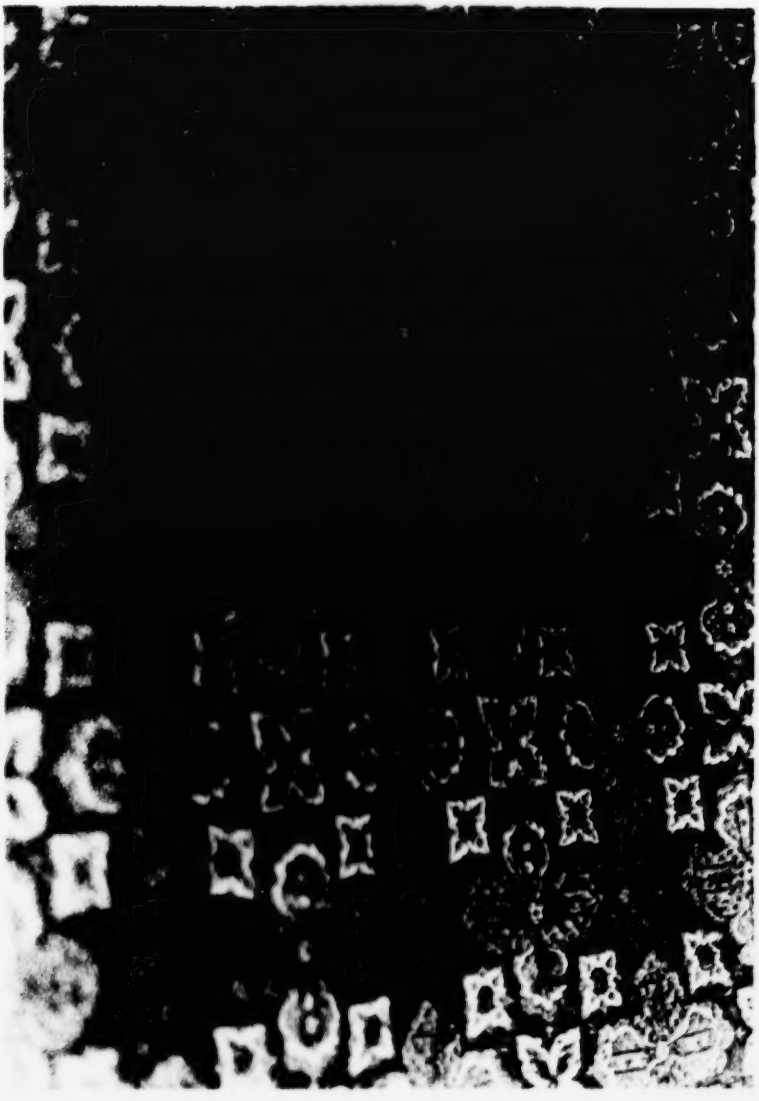
Jewell Heaton

This is a Friendship Quilt. It was made back in 1931 when Rev. Greer Griffith was called to preach over at Oak Flats. Now Bro. Greer and his wife Ethel were both members of Mt. Bethel Baptist Church. And the women over there decided to make a quilt for them in hopes that it would give them God's speed on their trip, since back then all we had to travel in was wagons and buggies. Now, when we decided to make the quilt, one woman would pick out the pattern and work it up, then start the quilt around. Each woman would work and make a block apiece. When each woman finished her block she would embroider her name in the pattern. It would take some time to make this quilt. When it was complete everyone would get together and throw a going away party. And here they would present the quilt to the family who was leaving. The women who had a part in making this quilt are as follows: May Griffith, Nettie Todd, Marie Heaton, Agnes Thomas, Sam Jones, Nettie Graves, Minnie Heaton, Annie Ray, Tula Heaton Katie Worsham, Berniece Thomas, Annie Witt Jones, Annie Bertha Smith, Ana Tee Hill, Jewel Heaton, Rachel Hill, Floy Heaton, Fanny Poss and Thelma Worsham. This friendship quilt consisted of twenty squares.



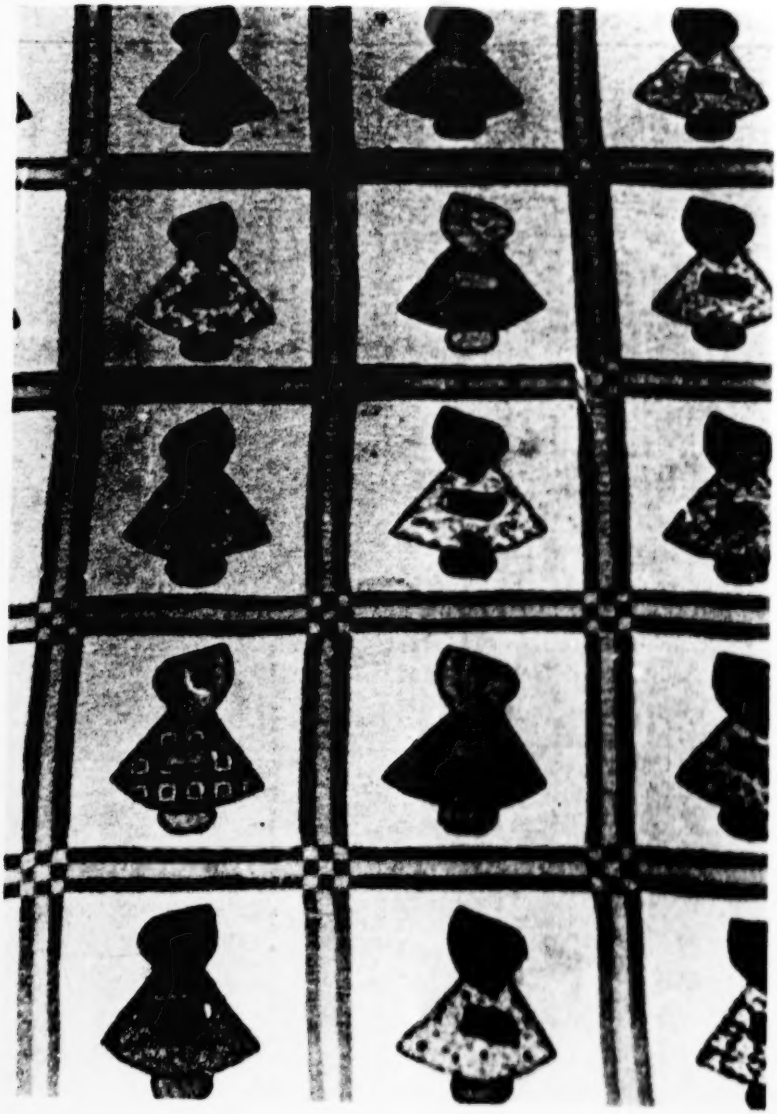
Allen Gilpatrick

This is one of many quilts Mrs. Ball made for her nine kids plus grandchildren. She enjoyed making them. This is a patch quilt made for Mrs. Gilpatrick. It is about 30 years old. It took her about 3 or 4 weeks to make by hand. It is a tufted quilt.



Evalyn Griffith

This Dutch Girl quilt was made in 1935. Embroidery, applique, brier stitch, and quilting were used. "I got the material in Carthage at Yarbrough's Drygood store. And I got the quilting thread from Dr. Z. L. Daniels store in Gary. It took me 6 months to make it. I was just starting to learn how. My mother, Ethel Ritter, taught me how to quilt and helped me on this Dutch Girl. If you looked real close you can tell her stitching from mine. It is 50 years old this year. My daughter, Kay Davis, has it now."



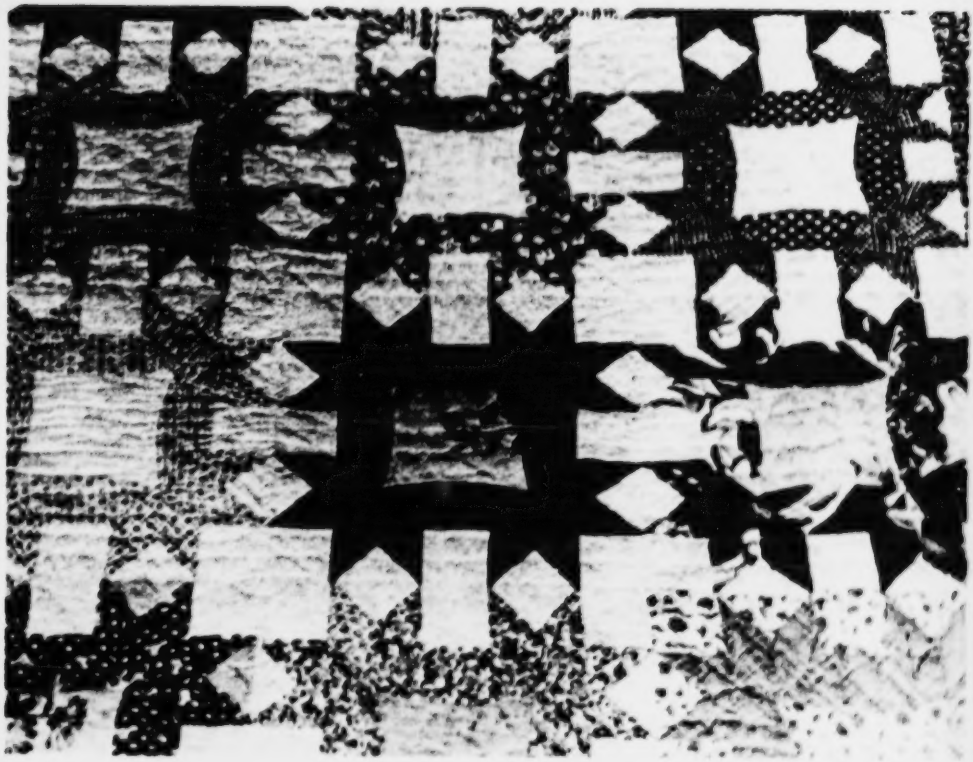
Vivian Burnaman

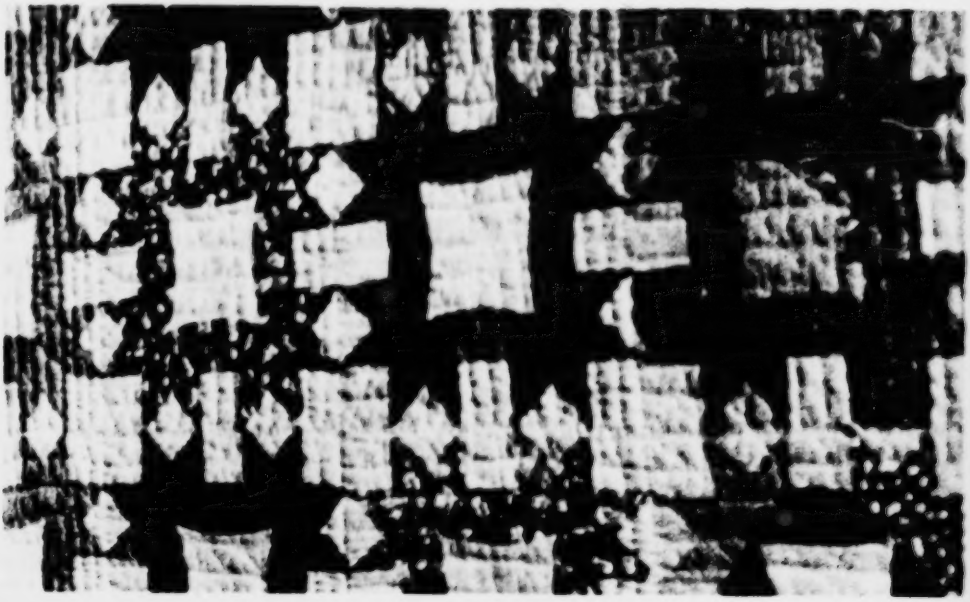
This quilt is about 50 years old or more. It was made by I was just a teen-ager. The quilt pattern is the standard Double Wedding Ring design. She made the quilt from some scrap material and old dresses.

I made this quilt, before I married, for her hope chest. It is a very popular pattern.

Sandy Osborne

One of them was made by my mother and one of them was made by my grandmother. They made them to be used to keep warm. The quilts were made in the 1930's or 40's, maybe even before that. They were made from cotton flour sacks and scraps of sewing material. They just made quilts for their own use. The pattern is either Chicken Tracks or Goose Tracks.

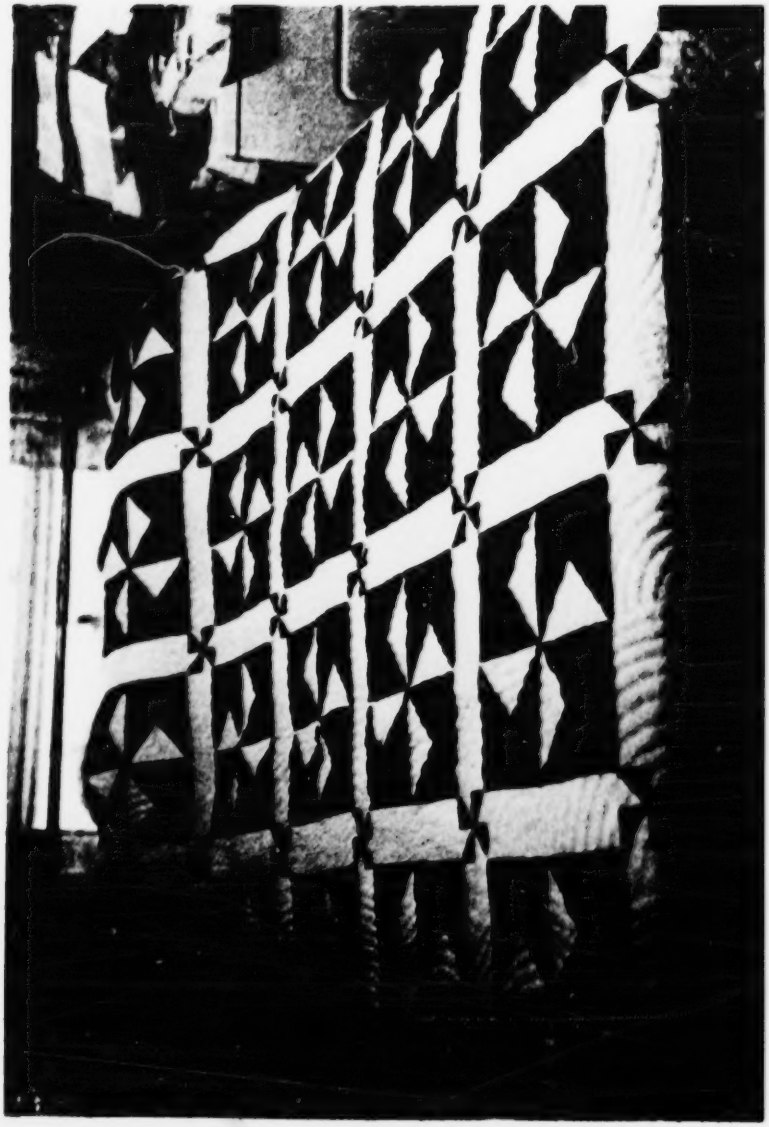




Mae Hall

This quilt was made for my own use in April of 1985. It has a brown flowered border of gingham material and the brown and white triangles are made of Pongee.

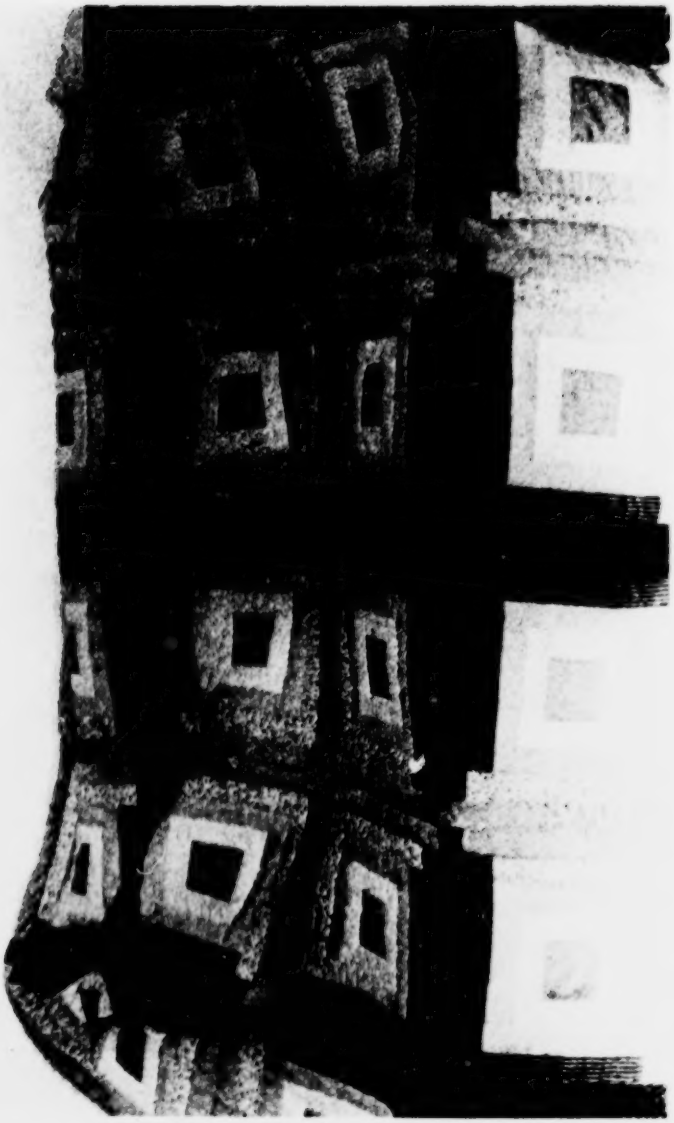
There is no special story behind this quilt. It was used basically for warmth in the winter. It is a pieced quilt with a Windmill Pattern.



Angie Rousey

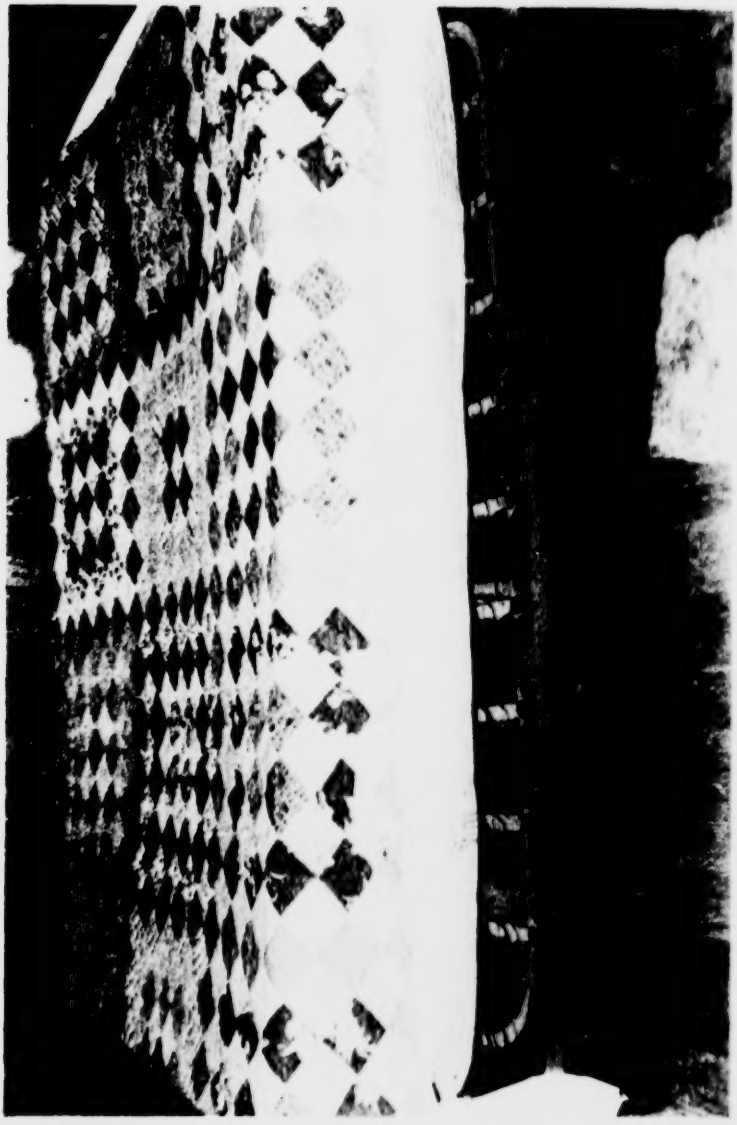
Mrs. Allison has been quilting since after she got married. She does it out of pleasure. She quilts for her family. She also belongs to a sewing group.

The quilt photographed was made for her grandson, Scott Thomas. She made it from scraps of material she had saved from dresses and such. She made the quilt a few years ago. It is a Log Cabin Pattern.



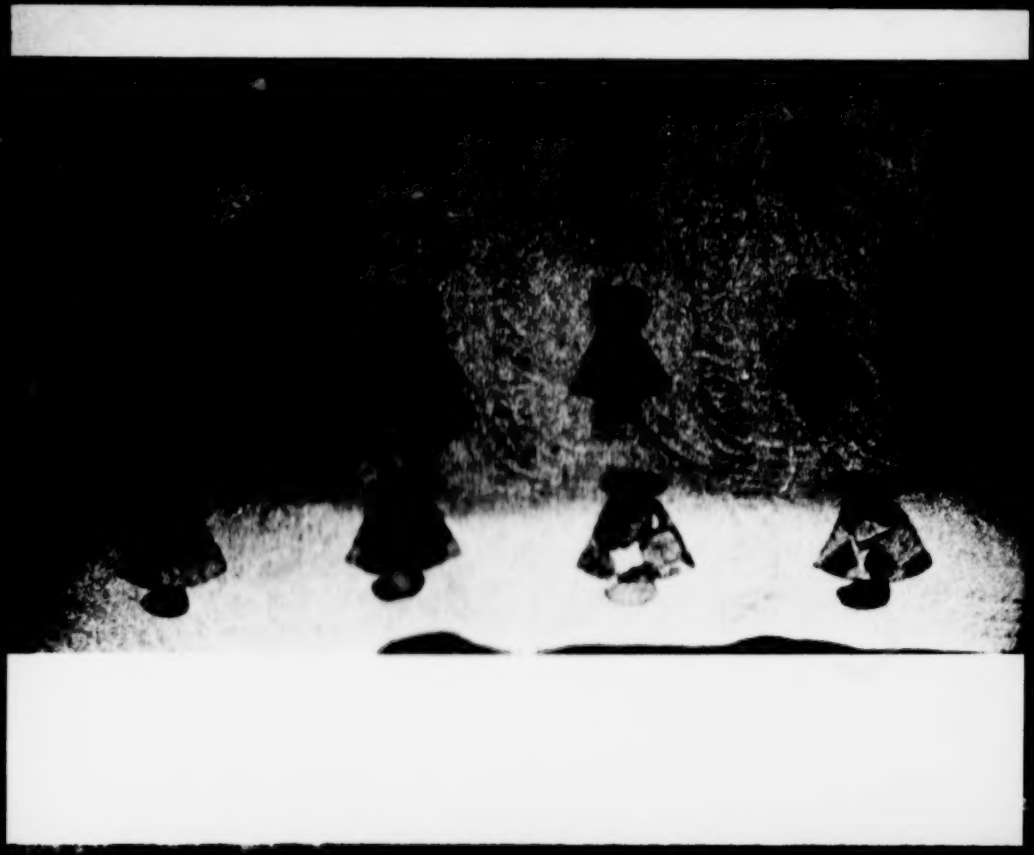
Vivian Jenkins

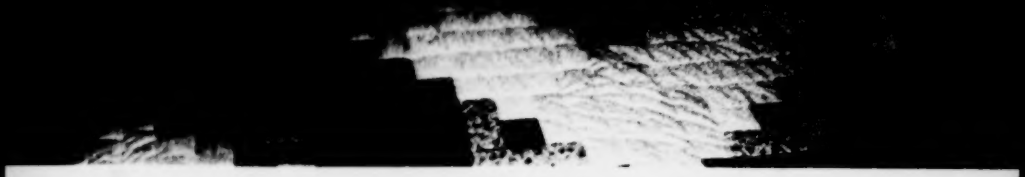
This quilt I made for myself. I made it when I was 67. It has been twelve years since it was made. When I was younger I made lots of quilts. But of course now, they are too old to use. The material I used was plain old cotton cloth. Of all the quilts I have made, only one is like a friendship quilt. I have made about ten quilts. The quilts were either hand woven or sewed on a sewing machine. This quilt could be used on both sides. You could turn it one way or use it the other way. It is a 20 Patch pattern quilt.



Rosabell Pass

This Dutch Doll was made for Karen Whiteside in 1971. I made them for all my granddaughters. I made the little doll dresses and bonnets out of scraps of material left over from dresses and blouses I had made. I started piecing quilts when I was fourteen and now I'm 66. I also make all my grandchildren a quilt when they get married. I made the Rail Fence and Karen came over and I was showing it to her and her mom. Well, she just flipped over that quilt. I decided I had better go ahead and give it to her because she was threatening to get married just to get it. So I just gave it to her because she was afraid I'd sell it and I didn't want her to get married.





Ethel McMillan

Q. Who made the quilt?

EM: My mother Kate McMillan made the quilt.

Q. Was it made for someone, or for a special reason, or made for bare necessity?

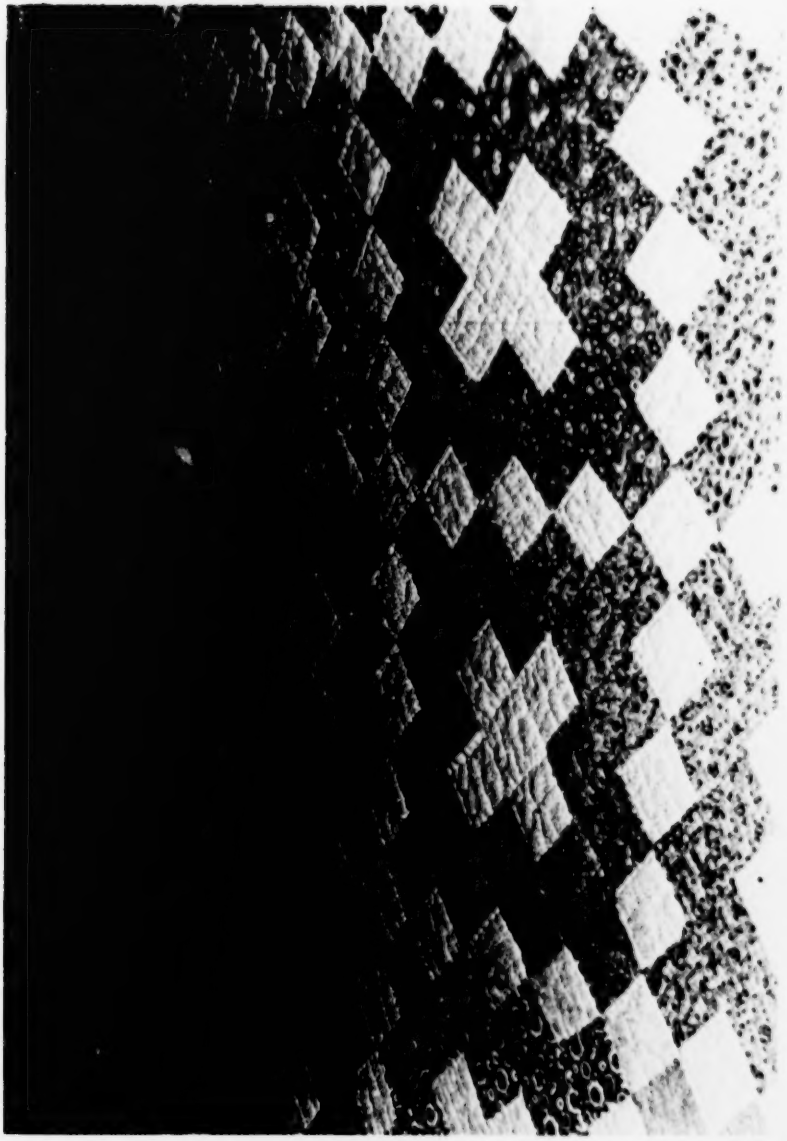
EM: There was a time in her life when it was a necessity, but these particular quilts I'm sure, were made to help pass time.

Q. Do you know how old the quilt is?

EM: I imagine it was made around 1947.

Q: What types of materials were used?

EM: Mostly sewing scraps, the patches. The striping and the lining was made of feed sacks. The padding was cotton. The quilt was hand made and quilted in blocks on a quilting square. It is in the 16 Patch pattern.



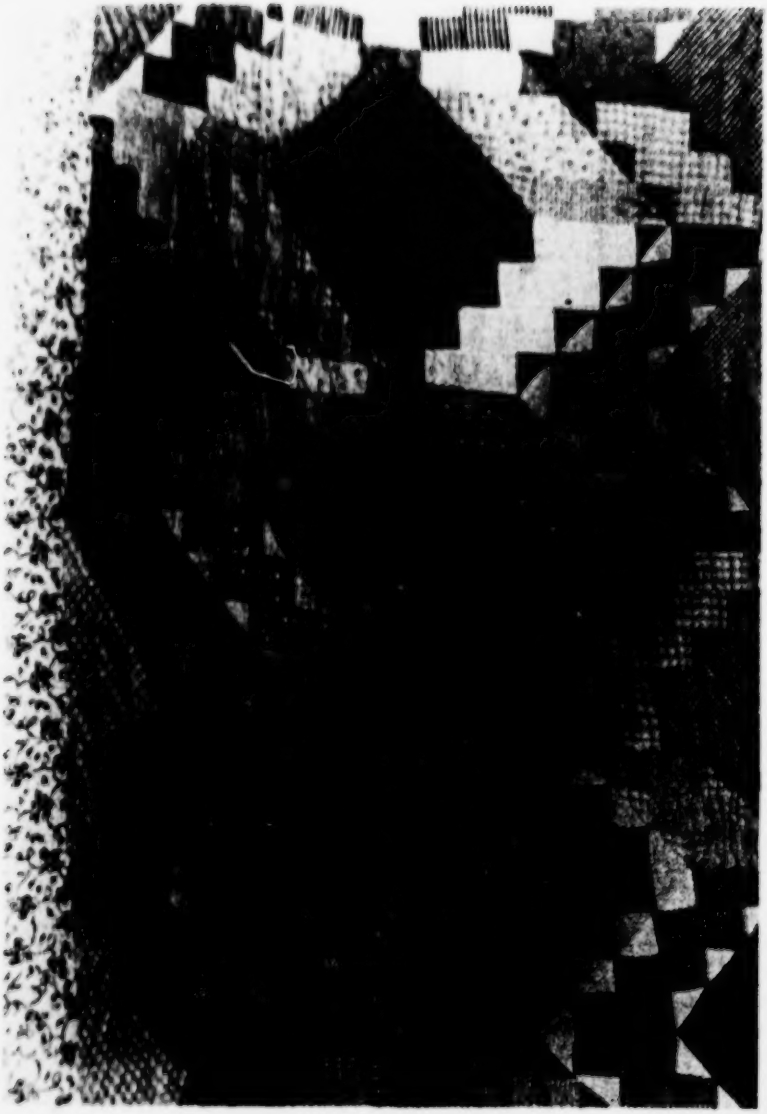
Geneva Vaughn

I studied about what year I made this quilt...I believe it was in the 30's. So it is over fifty years old. It took me about four months to make it. I pieced the top myself and I can't remember if someone helped me quilt it or not.

It was made generally for the whole family to use; just anyone who needed it.

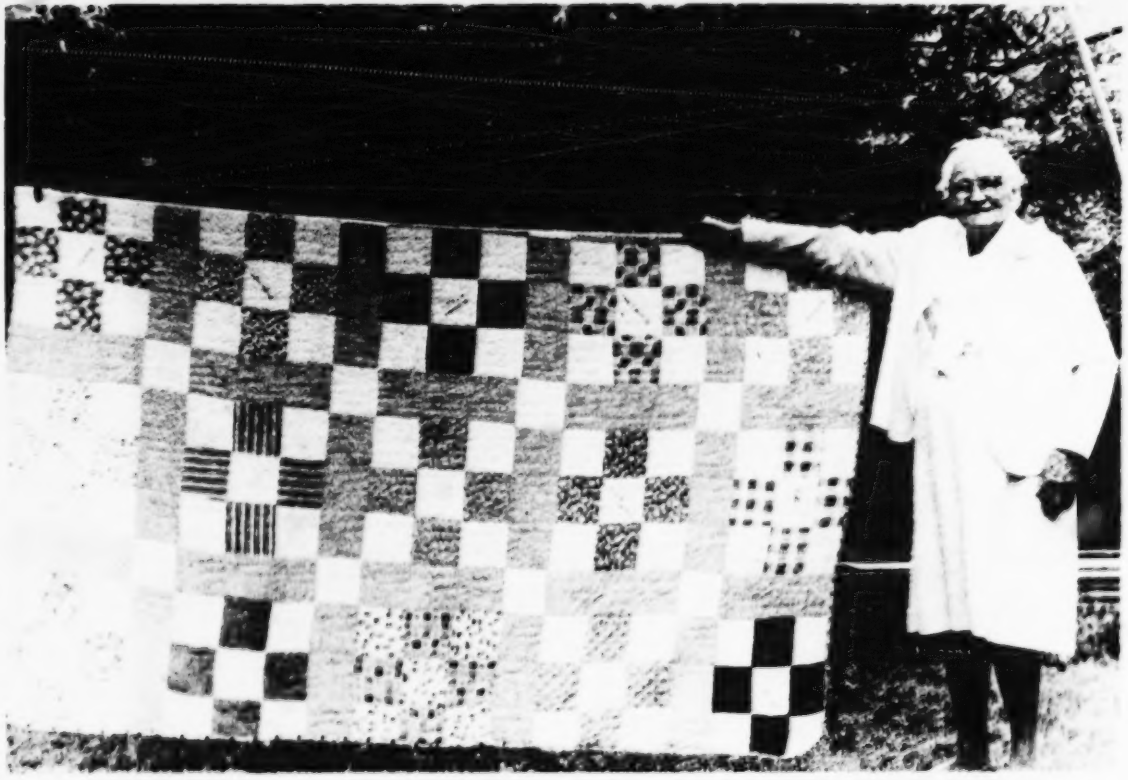
I made the quilt from pieces of material that were left from making dresses. I also used flour sacks, and the border is made from chicken feed sacks. We didn't buy material to make quilts, we used what we had. The filling was made from cotton that was left from bales that had been ginned.

The pattern is "Brides Stairway". I saw a picture of it in a farm magazine and cut my own pattern from the picture. It told what size the middle block was, and I went from that.



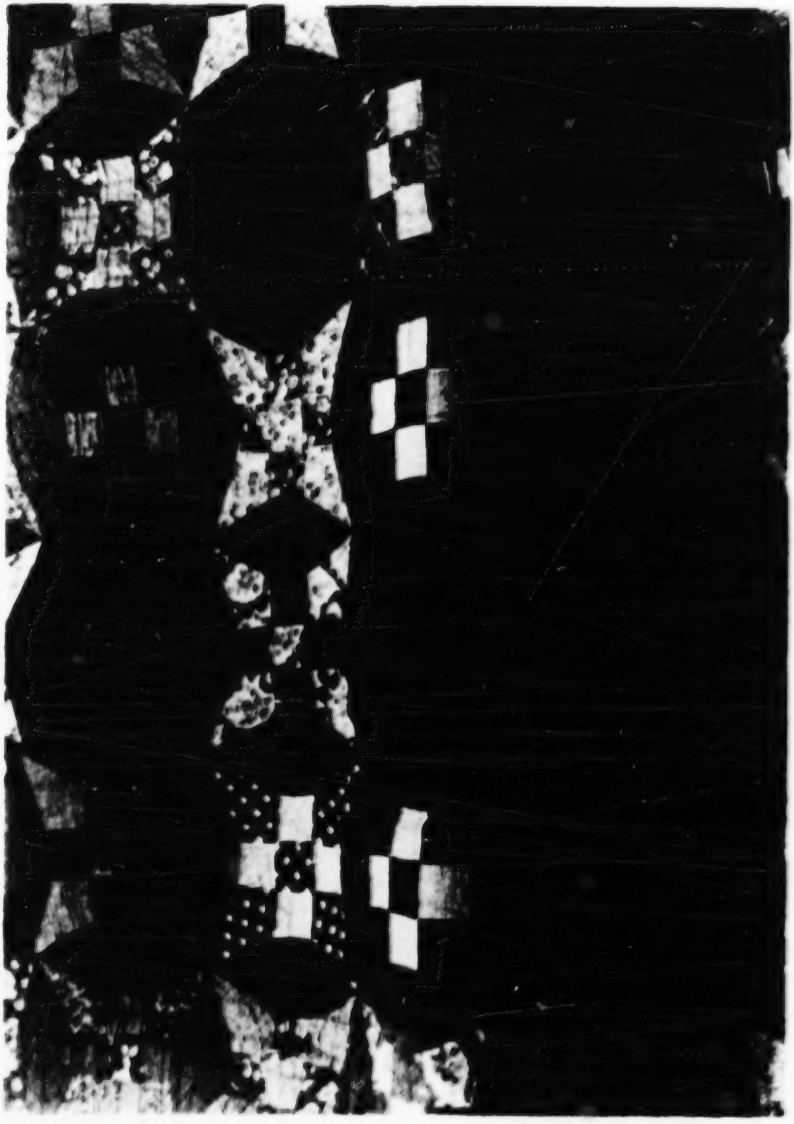
Mary Welch

This is called a frienship quilt. It was pieced in 1955 by the ladies auxilliary of Murvaul Missionary Baptist Church. It was made as a birthday gift for Ruth Welch's 12th birthday. Each lady pieced a block with her name on it, then my great grandmother, Mary Welch put the blocks together. Mrs. Leila Ritter who had a country store in Murvaul furnished white feed sacks to be used for lining. The ladies of the church then quilted the quilt at the church during ladies auxiliary every Wednesday. Drinks and cookies were served as they quilted. The quilt was given to Betty Liedtke this year because my great grandmother went to live in Nacogdoches with her daughter and couldn't carry all of her things.



Mrs. Cecil Langford

This quilt was made by my grandmother and she made it from scraps she had left over from sewing. She made several quilts because this was one of the ways of keeping warm in the winter and was also a form of recreation and a way to pass the time. It is a pieced quilt in an unusual Star pattern.



Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Powell at work - Dove pattern quilt in rear.